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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the question of the relative quality of the academic and professional components of teacher education programs from three different angles: (1) a critical assessment of several widely publicized and representative critiques of education courses with a focus on describing the variety of the criticisms and on assessing the quality of the evidence underlying the critiques; (2) an examination of two recent surveys of teacher education students' opinions of their courses which challenge commonly accepted views of what students think about their courses; and (3) an exploration of a new direction for studies of the quality of the components of teacher education programs which overcomes some of the weaknesses of existing approaches. It is concluded that recent state policies which place strict limits on the number of education courses in students' programs may be misguided given the currently weak knowledge base regarding the quality of academic and professional program components. (Author)

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Research Report 88-1

UNDERSTANDING THE CHARACTER AND QUALITY OF THE ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL COMPONENTS OF TEACHER EDUCATION

Kenneth M. Zeichner

NCRTE

National
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on Teacher Education

SP 030 645

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To further its mission, the NCRTE publishes research reports, issue papers, technical series, conference proceedings, and a newsletter on contemporary issues in teacher education. For more information about the NCRTE or to be placed on its mailing list, please write to the Editor, National Center for Research on Teacher Education, 516 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824-1034.

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Abstract

This paper explores the question of the relative quality of the academic and professional components of teacher education programs from three different angles: (a) a critical assessment of several widely publicized and representative critiques of education courses with a focus on describing the variety of the criticisms and on assessing the quality of the evidence underlying the critiques; (b) an examination of two recent surveys of teacher education students' opinions of their courses which challenge commonly accepted views of what students think about their courses; (c) an exploration of a new direction for studies of the quality of the components of teacher education programs which overcomes some of the weaknesses of existing approaches. It is concluded that recent state policies which place strict limits on the number of education courses in students' programs may be misguided given the currently weak knowledge base regarding the quality of academic and professional program components.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHARACTER AND QUALITY OF THE ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL COMPONENTS OF TEACHER EDUCATION*

Kenneth M. Zeichner**

A central issue in the current debate over the future of teacher education in the United States is concern with the intellectual quality of the professional education component of preservice teacher education programs. Since teacher education entered our colleges and universities in the early part of this century, there have been persistent charges that the professional education component of a teacher's education is less demanding, more trivial, and less thoughtful and thought provoking than courses that are taught in the academic departments of our colleges and universities (Cohen, 1986). Tensions and quarrels between education faculty and academic faculty have been consistently reported and discussed in the literature for many years (e.g., Conant, 1963; Reeder, 1951; Schwebel, 1985).[1]

As the current wave of teacher education reform continues, proposals to change the preservice teacher education curriculum continue to emerge. Among these are the recent changes in Texas (Imig, 1988) that set severe limits on the numbers of education courses that can be included in a preservice teacher education curriculum and alternative certification programs that allow people to enter teaching with very little formal coursework in education (Uhler, 1987).[2] Although proposals and programs that have caused teacher education students to spend more time in academic courses and less time in education

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courses have existed throughout most of this century (Zeichner, in press), there has been very little careful investigation of the validity of the assumptions regarding the inferior intellectual quality of education courses upon which many of these reform proposals rest.[3]

This paper seeks to do three things with regard to this issue. First, it will examine the various kinds of criticisms that have been leveled at education courses by critics from inside and outside of our colleges and universities. Here the focus will be on describing both the variety of criticisms and the nature of the evidence that has been used to support them. For the purposes of this paper, the focus will be on the criticisms leveled at education courses in a few of the most widely publicized critiques of teacher education in the 1950s and 1960s: (a) Arthur Bestor's Educational Wastelands (1953); (b) James Koerner's The Miseducation of American Teachers (1963); (c) James Conant's The Education of American Teachers (1963); and (d) Albert Lynd's Quackery in the Public Schools (1950). Although these four reports represent only a tiny fraction of the literature published on this issue, they are representative of the literature as a whole in terms of both the kinds of criticisms that have been leveled at education courses and the quality of the evidence that exists to support such criticisms.

Following this brief examination of criticisms leveled at education courses from the outside, attention will be devoted to the one area where formal research has been conducted to assess the relative intellectual quality of academic and education courses, surveys of student opinion.[4] Here the findings from two recent surveys of student opinion in teacher education will be presented that challenge commonly accepted views of what students think about the quality of education courses. The two studies to be reported were

conducted by the National Center for Research on Teacher Education (NCRTE) and the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE).

In the final section of the paper it will be argued that attempts to assess the relative quality of the academic and professional components of teacher education need to move beyond surveys of student opinion to direct comparisons of the character and quality of different kinds of courses based, in part, on analyses of course documents and direct observations of classroom events. Here the focus will be on exploring the kinds of criteria that could be employed in such assessments. Recent work on the issues of academic and professional quality done by staff at the National Center for Research on Teacher Education will be drawn upon to illustrate indicators of academic and professional quality that could be used in efforts to gather evidence on this issue.

External Critiques of Education Courses

The negative image of education courses and of the faculty who teach them has existed ever since teacher education entered our colleges and universities in the early part of this century (King, 1987) and is clearly illustrated by James Conant's (1963) recollections of his own career as a faculty member at Harvard University:

> Early in my career as a professor of chemistry, I became aware of the hostility of the members of my profession to schools or faculties of education. I shared the views of the majority of my colleagues on the faculty of arts and sciences that there was no excuse for the existence of people who sought to teach others how to teach. I felt confident that I was an excellent teacher and that I developed my skill by experience, without benefit of professors of education. I saw no reason why others could not do likewise, including those who graduated from college with honors in chemistry and who wished to teach in high school. . . . When any issues involving benefits to the graduate school of education came before the faculty of arts and sciences, I automatically voted with those who looked with contempt on the school of education. (pp. 1-2)

Probably the most wide ranging critique of the education component of teacher education programs was conducted by James Koerner in 1963. For periods ranging from one day to a week, Koerner visited 63 institutions across the United States. He focused on those schools that both by general reputation and by reputation in preparing teachers, were widely regarded as the best in the field. At each institution, Koerner visited education classes (for unspecified periods of time), collected course syllabi, reading lists, and other printed matter and spoke with faculty, administrators, and students. He also analyzed student transcripts in 32 representative institutions. Koerner focused his critique on three aspects of the education component: the faculty, the students, and the quantity and quality of the coursework.

James Conant's research team visited 77 teacher education institutions across the country, conversed with faculty and students, sat in on classes, and examined catalogs, course outlines and textbooks. They also interviewed small groups of teachers in different parts of the country (about 300-400 in all) about their own education. Neither Arthur Bestor, who was a professor of history at the time he wrote his critique, nor Albert Lynd, a school board member in Sharon, Massachusetts, visited any teacher education institutions or observed or interviewed any teacher educators or students in the preparation of their reports.

All four of these critiques come down fairly hard on the quality of education courses:

> Whatever they claim to do and be, they [education courses] deserve the ill-repute that has always been accorded them by members of the academic faculty, by teachers themselves, and by the general public. Most education courses are vague, insipid, time wasting adumbrations of the obvious, and probably irrelevant to academic teaching. (Koerner, 1963, pp. 55-56)

There are a number of different kinds of criticisms that are part of this general condemnation of education courses which was such a popular sport in the 1950s and 1960s. (The reemergence of these critiques in the 1980s has added nothing substantially new to the debate.) Lynd (1950) for example, was greatly concerned about the proliferation of education courses that he found when he examined a large sample of college and university bulletins. He provided the readers of Quackery with lists of courses having similar titles to show how education faculty "have covered every imaginable topic and subtopic of pedagogy with a course" (p. 141). Lynd as well as Koerner (1963) argued that there was a great deal of duplication of content in these courses. Koerner's charge of repetitiveness is based in part on an analysis he conducted of 70 of the most frequently used education texts. He found a great deal of duplication both within and among the books he reviewed.

> Take, for example, the subject of how to use the "resources" of the community for school purposes--its public and private institutions, its outstanding citizens, its recreational facilities, etc. The education student covers this material the first time in his textbook in educational psychology, again in his textbook on methods of teaching, again in his textbook on audio-visual aids, again in his textbook on curriculum development, again in his textbook on secondary, or elementary education. . . . The same is true of countless other subjects, such as classroom discipline, the importance of individual differences, motivating students. . . . By the time the student has been through two or three such books, all he hears is echoes. (p. 71)

In addition to these charges that education courses are too many and too repetitive, Lynd, Koerner, and Bestor all argue that the content in these courses is too superficial. Since the beginning of teacher education in our colleges and universities there have been persistent doubts about the value of the "knowledge base" underlying education courses. Many have felt and continue to feel that education has not yet developed a corpus of independent knowledge and techniques to warrant giving it full academic status (Schneider, 1987). Lynd (1950) utilized catalog descriptions of courses as evidence to

support his charges of superficiality. Koerner (1963) argued that education texts are geared at an extremely low intellectual level reflecting a low estimate of the comprehension abilities of the students who are to read them.

Bestor (1953) argued that these courses could not help but be superficial because of the education and training of those who taught them:

> University and graduate departments of education began as agencies of genuine interdisciplinary investigation and teaching. When however, they began to recruit their faculties from young men trained by themselves, they gradually lost their original character. Several academic generations have now passed and the overwhelming majority of present day professors of education have received virtually all their advanced training in departments of education. Their knowledge of the disciplines that are required to solve pedagogical problems is for the most part elementary and secondhand. And this knowledge is passed on, increasingly diluted and increasingly out of date, to new generations of professional educationists. (p. 108)

Koerner (1963), who identified the "inferior intellectual quality of education faculty" (p. 36) as the fundamental limitation of the field, reported on his impressions of educationists after having talked with hundreds of them during his travels around the United States:

> One's principal impression of educationists at the end of such a safari as mine is that of a sincere, humanitarian, well intentioned, hard working, poorly informed, badly educated and ineffectual group of men and women. . . . In all of those timeless and imponderable ways in which comparisons and judgments are made in person to person situations--involving clarity of discourse, subtlety, force, depth of knowledge, intellectual penetration. . . . the education professor comes off poorly in relation to the academic professor on the same campus. (pp. 36-37)

Lynd (1950) used excerpts of the writings of educationists to demonstrate their inferior abilities: "It is hard to resist the conclusion that the ideas of educationists, upon which they propose to make the most for reaching decisions about the real needs of our children, are as fuzzy as their vocabularies" (p. 39). He cited numerous examples of "educationese" (i.e., educational jargon) and examples of poor educationist grammar to support his assertions.

Only Conant (1963) and Koerner (1963) among this group of critics ever visited any of the education courses that were the subject of their criticisms. (Conant argued that the academic professors who advanced criticisms of education courses knew far too little about the courses.) There are several instances in the reports which did not include observations of classes, where charges are made and one is left to wonder about the evidence upon which the charges are based.

Bestor (1953) for example, without providing any specific examples, charges that education courses are sites for the dissemination of propaganda for particular views rather than arenas for open-minded and critical comparison of many different views: "This warping of the great intellectual disciplines to serve the narrow purposes of indoctrination and vocationalism characterizes offerings in the present day departments of education" (p. 143). Bestor's lack of attention to providing the reader with specifics related to these charges is very surprising given his repeated emphasis on the importance of standards of academic scholarship.

Even in the two instances where the critics did observe education and academic courses for brief periods of time, the evidence provided to the reader in support of the criticisms of how classes were conducted is very sketchy and/or absent. Both Koerner and Conant offer very sharp condemnations of the conduct of education classes:

> I managed to visit about 200 classes, chiefly in education but also in the academic subjects that most often are a part of teacher's programs. Let me say at once that I do not see how any observer, having made such visits to a large number of institutions, could fail to conclude that education courses deserve their ill-repute. Like the textbooks, they suffer from a high degree of dullness and superfluity. . . . In none of the education courses I attended was the "atmosphere of excitement" or the "imaginative consideration of learning" noticeable. Instead, what was evident most often was the poverty of the instructor's scholarship, the thinness of the material, and the conspicuous consumption of student time. (Koerner, 1963, pp. 82-83)

> The classes I have visited are far too reminiscent of the less satisfactory high school classes I have seen. The course is dominated by a textbook or a syllabus, and the instructor seems to be wedded to the dogma that a discussion must take place whether the talk is lively or the class is bored. The pace and the intellectual level seemed geared to students far less able than those in the top 30 percent group from which we should recruit our teachers. (Conant, 1963, p. 129)

The most that is provided to support these rather strongly worded charges is a set of brief descriptions of 12 of the classes observed by Koerner. While these examples do show instances where students are passive, intellectual demands are low, and so forth, one has no way of knowing how representative these examples are of education courses in general. Koerner expects us to take his word for it that they are representative of both the courses observed and of education courses generally. Conant does not offer his readers any specific evidence in support of his general observations.

One other aspect of these condemnations of education courses is the constant criticism of the quality of students who are enrolled in them. Both Conant (1963) and Koerner (1963) are very critical of low standards of admission into teacher education programs and hold student characteristics partly responsible for the low level of intellectual discourse they claimed to have found within courses. They provide some specific data in support of these charges. Recent work, however, shows that the relative standing of education students in our colleges and universities is not always below that of students with other majors (Lanier and Little, 1986).

What is most striking about this set of critiques of the teacher education establishment is the poor quality of the evidence provided to support numerous charges of ineptitude and incompetence. What seems to be most troublesome are the numerous assertions about the way in which education courses are conducted that are based on very sketchy observational data and are revealed through statements of "general impressions." Despite all of the

numerous reports on teacher education, little or no systematic investigation of the quality of courses has been based on careful analyses of course content and academic demands or on carefully documented observations of classroom interactions. It is also very interesting, that even the harshest of these critics, Bestor and Koerner, conclude that many of the same problems identified in education courses are also present in academic courses:

> The academic component of a teacher's education which after all remains the primary one, is also badly in need of attention. Course work in academic courses is sometimes not much stronger than than in education, a fact that academicians ought to face with candor. . . . Although academic teachers are certainly more effective in their students' eyes than are education professors, all indications are that course work in the liberal arts areas could be immeasurably better than it is. (Koerner, 1963, p. 20)

The lack of strong evidence to support criticisms of the professional component of teacher education does not mean of course that these charges are untrue. Many of the charges related to the numbers of courses, duplication of content, and education backgrounds of faculty are undoubtedly as true today as they were in the 1950s and 1960s. These reports have not helped us much though in understanding with any reasonable degree of certainty the degree to which claims about the consequences of these factors are true (i.e., criticisms about the way in which courses are actually conducted).

This question of evidence is especially important in relation to the issue of the quality of academic and education courses because of the existence of several alternative explanations for the existence of these criticisms that have less to do with the actual quality of the courses involved than with other factors: (a) the gender composition and social class backgrounds of education students; (b) the social class backgrounds of education faculty; (c) the low status of the occupation to which schools of education are connected; (d) long-standing doubts about the value of the "knowledge base" of education courses; (e) differences in work responsibilities between

education and academic faculty that typically result in heavier teaching and supervisory commitments for education faculty; and (f) long-standing structural characteristics of the field that have impaired its effectiveness such as the lack of funds (Clark, 1986; Clifford, 1986; Ginsburg, 1988; Judge, 1982; Lanier and Little, 1986; Schneider, 1987). All of these factors influence but do not in any final way determine the quality of education course offerings.

Consumers' Reports

There is only one area in which fairly systematic research has been conducted to determine the quality of various kinds of courses in a teacher education curriculum. Some examples from this literature will be examined to determine what they illustrate about the quality of academic and education courses.

One of the earliest reported surveys of student opinion of the relative quality of academic and education courses was conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (Stiles, 1959). During the 1957-58 academic year the university's Department of Education asked all students who were preparing for teaching enrolled in the first semester and former students who had graduated in the years 1957, 1955, and 1953 to give their reactions to required undergraduate courses in education. A total of 1,038 students and former students reacted to a questionnaire that, among other things, asked them to indicate the amount of satisfaction they felt with the study of education courses in general and specifically in comparison with noneducation courses they had taken.

Some of the items in the survey dealt with the adequacy of courses as preparation for teaching while others focused on the intellectual character of courses or on a more global undifferentiated rating. These surveys showed that only 50 percent of the students expressed overall satisfaction with education courses. Only 28 percent of the students expressed overall satisfaction when these courses were compared to noneducation courses. This survey reveals a pattern of response that was to become common in later surveys of this type where education courses are viewed as less satisfying than academic courses, with the one exception of student teaching which is judged as the most satisfying experience of all.

Dean Stiles (1959) concluded two things from this survey. First, he felt the data supported the view that "general condemnations of education courses are subject to error when leveled at the University of Wisconsin" (pp. 186-87). Some sections of every course were rated very high, even in the education courses that with the exception of student teaching, came out less well than the general category "noneducation courses you have taken." Stiles also concluded that some specific actions needed to be taken to strengthen the content of some education courses or particular sections of courses, by pitching the content at a higher level, placing greater emphasis on factual material, eliminating duplication, and concentrating class periods on information that can not be obtained from reading textbooks. Stiles claimed that the student reactions obtained in this survey were more positive on most points than might have been expected given the presence of several factors: (a) the courses assessed were required ones; (b) many students who were surveyed didn't intend to become career teachers; (c) the survey was carried out at a time when criticism of education courses was common in the public press and on many campuses in the United States.

One of the most extensive surveys of student opinion conducted to date, was carried out by James Koerner (1963) as part of his investigations of teacher education across the United States. Koerner administered a questionnaire to 376 recent graduates of teacher education programs in institutions that represent all of the various types of institutions involved in teacher education. Many of the respondents took advantage of the opportunity offered by Koerner to write comments about their college work. Of the 217 people who commented at some length on their questionnaires, 3 were strongly favorable in evaluating their education courses, and 62 were somewhat favorable. Koerner also reports that 152 (70 percent) were unfavorable toward their education courses either somewhat or strongly. Almost all of these 217 people evaluated their academic courses favorably, regardless of their attitude toward education courses. Following are a few examples of the typical response that Koerner received in this survey:

> Elementary Teacher--I found the education courses which I took (and the one I am currently taking) almost entirely worthless. The most worthwhile courses I studied were liberal arts courses. (p. 113)

> Elementary Teacher--I firmly believe that education courses are a complete waste of time at any college and most of my friends agree with me. The only worthwhile and truly helpful course is student teaching--the length of the student teaching program should definitely be extended while the other superficial courses cut out or at least clipped to the bare essentials. (p. 116)

> The gap between the liberal arts courses and the education courses is very large in regard to intellectual content and challenge. The education courses generally lack substance. Students should take more liberal arts courses and a bare minimum of methods courses. (p. 337)

In addition to this formal survey of the opinions of teacher education program graduates, Koerner conversed with numerous students enrolled in the 63 institutions visited during the study. He concluded on the basis of these conversations (which took place before and after classes and in various places around campuses where students congregate) that the overwhelming student

opinion of education courses was negative even in the fifth-year programs sponsored by some of "our more exalted institutions." Koerner reports that in general, student grievances were the familiar ones:

> Education courses are dull and directionless; the instructor is nice but uninformed and uninteresting; the time and tuition are being wasted; practice teaching is the best part of the program; more academic work is needed. Occasionally, there is a vote of confidence in a particular education course or professor. Often there are hard words for the academic courses as well, chiefly on grounds that the instructor remains too aloof or that his lectures are too specialized. (p. 105)

Most of what is reported by Koerner with regard to his survey and "conversations" with students closely resembles what is now taken for granted by many, as what students think about the relative quality of the academic and professional components of teacher education. There is some hint here though that all is not well in the world of letters and sciences.

James Conant's (1963) highly publicized study of teacher education in the United States also included opportunities for teacher education students to express their opinions about the quality of education courses. Conant's report of these conversations closely resembles Koerner's report:

> I must report that I have heard time and time again complaints about their quality [state-required courses]. To be sure, by no means all students I interviewed were critical; so many were however, that I could not ignore their repeated comments that most of the education offerings were "Mickey Mouse" courses. There can be no doubt that at least in some institutions the courses given by professors of education have a bad name among undergraduates, particularly those intending to be high school teachers. (p. 12)

Sometimes in surveys of this type a distinction is made within the category of academic courses between general education courses and specialized area courses. In some of these cases, education courses have been rated more favorably than general education courses but not more favorably than specialized area courses. For example, although Yamamoto et al. (1969) described a rather pervasive feeling among students of frustration at what they perceived

to be "trivial, fractionalized, and irrelevant curricular experiences and routinized, impersonal and unimaginative instructional contacts" (p. 474), they also found that students rated the quality of their instructors in education courses more favorably than their instructors in general education courses. Even when education courses come out relatively well when pitted against some other courses though, the overall climate of opinion is still generally negative.[5]

Two recent surveys provide us with information about students' opinions of various kinds of courses that is substantially at odds with much of the extant literature on this issue. After examining the findings of these two surveys, the general issue of how far student opinion surveys can really take us in understanding the quality of the courses in a teacher education curriculum will be considered.

The first survey was conducted in the fall of 1986 by the National Center for Research on Teacher Education (NCRTE) as part of the pilot testing it performed in the development of the instruments for its Teacher Education and Learning to Teach Study (NCRTE, 1988). In this study 97 students from three relatively large state universities (two in the midwest; one in the southeast) were surveyed about many things, including their opinions of their teacher education programs and courses. The sample consisted of a mixture of elementary education majors and secondary certification candidates in English and mathematics education. At the time of the survey, all three of the institutions offered fairly standard teacher education programs in both elementary and secondary education (e.g., four-year; no academic major for elementary candidates), though each was reputed to be of relatively good quality.

Students were first asked to assess the general reputation of the teacher education program on their campus. Table 1 indicates, contrary to popular belief, that students overwhelmingly felt (87.3 percent) that their teacher education program had a very strong academic reputation on their campus.

Table 1

NCRTE Responses to the Question:
"What in your view is the general reputation of the teacher education program on your campus?"

No.	%	
8	8.5	It is not very strong academically, but it does a good job of preparing teachers.
7	7.5	It is strong academically, but it does not do a very good job of preparing teachers.
75	79.8	It is strong both academically and as a professional preparation program.
4	4.2	It is weak both as an academic program and as a professional preparation program.
Totals 94	100	

Students were then asked to assess how they felt their teacher education courses differed from other courses offered at their university on several specific dimensions: (a) the degree of academic demand or challenge provided; (b) the degree of opportunity to develop a personal capacity for independent thought; (c) the amount of substantive material actually covered; (d) the amount of trivial material covered; (e) the opportunity for intellectual growth; (f) the amount of thought required to complete assignments; (g) their perceptions of faculty expectations for students to inquire and to argue; and (h) their perceptions of faculty expectations for assignments to be thorough and rigorous. Tables 2-9 summarize the findings from these questions.

Table 2

NCRTE Responses to the Question:
"How do you think teacher education courses differ from other courses offered at your university in the degree of academic demand or challenge?"

No.	%	
14	15.4	More in teacher education courses.
47	51.7	About the same.
30	32.9	More in other courses.
Totals 91	100	

Table 3

NCRTE Responses to the Question:
"How do you think teacher education courses differ from other courses offered in your university in the degree of opportunity to develop a personal capacity for independent thought?

No.	%	
35	38.9	More in teacher education courses.
39	43.3	About the same.
16	17.8	More in other courses.
Totals 90	100	

Table 4

NCRTE Responses to the Question:
"How do you think teacher education courses differ from other courses offered in your university in the amount of substantive material actually covered?"

	No.	%	
	16	17.8	More in teacher education courses.
	52	57.8	About the same.
	22	24.4	More in other courses.
Totals	90	100	

Table 5

NCRTE Responses to the Question:
"How do You think teacher education courses differ from other courses offered in your university in the amount of trivial material?"

	No.	%	
	22	24.5	More in teacher education courses.
	40	44.4	About the same.
	28	31.1	More in other courses.
Totals	90	100	

Table 6

NCRTE Responses to the Question:
"How do you think teacher education courses differ from other courses offered in your university in the opportunity for intellectual growth?"

No.	%	
25	27.8	More in teacher education courses.
46	51.1	About the same.
19	21.1	More in other courses.
Totals 90	100	

Table 7

NCRTE Responses to the Question:
"How do you think teacher education courses differ from other courses offered in your university in the amount of thought required to complete assignments?"

No.	%	
21	23.3	More in teacher education courses.
53	58.9	About the same.
16	17.8	More in other courses.
Totals 90	100	

Table 8

NCRTE Responses to the Question:
"With regard to the expectations that faculty have for students, how would you rate the differences between teacher education courses and courses in other areas?" --
"They expect students to be able to inquire and to argue."

	No.	%	
	26	29.6	More in teacher education courses.
	49	55.7	About the same.
	13	14.7	More in other courses.
Totals	88	100	

Table 9

NCRTE Responses to the Question:
"With regard to the expectations that faculty have for students, how would you rate the differences between teacher education courses and courses in other areas?" --
"They expect students to be thorough and rigorous."

	No.	%	
	26	29.6	More in teacher education courses.
	49	55.7	About the same.
	13	14.7	More in other courses.
Totals	88	100	

Although somewhere between 15 and 32 percent of the students consistently rated noneducation courses higher than education courses, it is very clear in these results that education courses do not come out as badly on these academically oriented criteria as they did in previous surveys. On each of the criteria assessed in this study, at least two-thirds of the respondents felt that education courses were at least as demanding, rigorous, and so forth as noneducation courses.

A second survey was conducted by the Research About Teacher Education Project Committee" of AACTE in 1986 and again in 1987.[6] Questionnaires were administered in 1986 to 876 students who were enrolled in secondary methods courses in 76 teacher education institutions and again in 1987 to 729 teacher education students enrolled in foundations courses. The results of this survey, like the NCRTE survey, are at odds with conventional wisdom on many points (AACTE, 1987).

Students in the AACTE survey were asked to compare education courses and noneducation courses according to their rigor. As Table 10 indicates, in both years of the study around two thirds of the respondents indicated that education courses were as or more rigorous than noneducation courses. This is consistent with the pattern of response in the NCRTE study but very unlike most other studies.

Students were also asked to estimate the "intellectual rigor" of their methods course (1986), or foundations course (1987), in comparison to the most advanced courses which they had taken in several specific disciplines: English, history, foreign language, science, mathematics. Here the results are mixed. In English and history (see Tables 11 and 12) about two-thirds of the students surveyed each year said that their education course was as

intellectually rigorous or more rigorous than the most advanced course they had taken in these fields.

Table 10

AACTE Responses to the Question:
"How rigorous are courses in your professional education sequence compared to courses outside your school, college or department of education. My professional sequence is:"

1986

	No.	%	
	232	26.6	Less rigorous than most noneducation majors.
	261	29.9	As rigorous as most other noneducation majors.
	291	33.4	More rigorous than most other noneducation majors.
	88	10.1	No basis for judgment.
Totals	872	100	

1987

	97	13.4	Less rigorous than most noneducation majors.
	246	34.1	As rigorous as most other noneducation majors.
	267	36.9	More rigorous than most other noneducation majors.
	113	15.6	No basis for judgment.
Totals	723	100	

Table 11

AACTE Responses to the Question:
"Would you estimate the intellectual rigor of this methods course by rating it in comparison to the most advanced courses which you've had in English?
This methods (foundations) course is:"

1986

	No.	%	
	213	25.5	Much less or less rigorous.
	337	40.3	About the same as.
	240	28.7	More, or much more rigorous than.
	46	5.5	No basis for judgment.
Totals	836	100	

1987

	189	26.5	Much less or less rigorous.
	287	40.2	About the same as.
	198	27.7	More, or much more rigorous than.
	40	5.6	No basis for judgment.
Totals	714	100	

Table 12

AACTE Responses to the Question:
"Would you estimate the intellectual rigor of this methods course by rating it in comparison to the most advanced courses which you've had in history?
This methods (foundations) course is:"

1986

	No.	%	
	223	26.8	Much less or less rigorous.
	278	33.4	About the same as.
	244	29.3	More or much more rigorous than.
	87	10.5	No basis for judgment.
Totals	832	100	

1987

	173	24.3	Much less or less rigorous.
	255	35.7	About the same as.
	206	29.0	More or much more rigorous than.
	78	11.0	No basis for judgment.
Totals	712	100	

In science and mathematics on the other hand (see Tables 13 and 14), the majority of students clearly felt that their academic courses were as or more intellectually rigorous than their education course. From 42.5 percent-49.5 percent of these students judged their education course to be less rigorous than their most advanced mathematics and science classes. The results with regard to foreign language are less clear because so many students (35.4 percent and 41 percent) apparently never took a foreign language class at their university (see Table 15). In any case, only about one third of the students surveyed judged their education course to be as intellectually rigorous or more rigorous than the most advanced foreign language course they had taken.

Table 13

AACTE Responses to the Question:
"Would you estimate the intellectual rigor of this methods (foundations) course by rating it in comparison with the most advanced courses which you had in science? This methods (fouundations) course is:"

	No.	%	1986
	412	49.5	Much less or less rigorous.
	211	25.4	About the same as.
	134	16.1	More or much more rigorous than
	75	9.0	No basis for judgment.
Totals	832	100	
			1987
	304	42.5	Much less or less rigorous.
	209	29.4	About the same as.
	130	18.2	More or much more rigorous than.
	71	9.9	No basis for judgment.
Totals	714	100	

Table 14

AACTE Responses to the Question:
"Would you estimate the intellectual rigor of this methods (foundations) course by rating It in comparison with the most advanced courses which you had in mathematics?
This methods (foundations) course is:"

1986

No.	%	
411	49.4	Much less or less rigorous.
200	23.6	About the same as.
132	15.8	More or much more rigorous than.
94	11.2	No basis for judgment.
Totals 832	100	

1987

303	42.5	Much less or less rigorous.
186	26.0	About the same as.
150	21.0	More or much more rigorous than.
75	10.5	No basis for judgment.
Totals 714	100	

Table 15

AACTE Responses to the Question:
"Would you estimate the intellectual rigor of this methods (foundations) course by rating it in comparison with the most advanced courses which you've had in foreign language? This methods (foundations) course is:"

1986

	No.	%	
	245	29.8	Much less or less rigorous.
	167	20.2	About the same as.
	120	14.6	More or much more rigorous than.
	291	35.4	No basis for judgment.
Totals	823	100	

1987

	202	28.8	Much less or less rigorous.
	117	16.8	About the same as.
	94	13.4	More or much more rigorous than.
	287	41.0	No basis for judgment.
Totals	700	100	

The AACTE (1987) study taken as a whole, presents a "more positive than should be expected" picture of students opinions of their education courses. Despite the relatively weak position of education courses in relation to science and math courses, the blanket rejection of education courses by their consumers indicated in so many early studies, is absent. Here and in the study conducted by the NCRTE, we find that our commonsense notions about what students think about their courses may need to be altered.

The question needs to be raised at this point about the extent to which surveys of students' opinions of courses can help us understand the quality of the courses in the teacher education curriculum or whether there is a more productive way to approach this issue. There are several major problems that limit the usefulness of these surveys as lenses for understanding or as guides for policy. First, although there is some contention about the so-called current crisis in higher education in the United States (e.g., Trow, 1987), several recent studies have focused on the need to improve the academic quality of all of undergraduate education, not just education courses (e.g., Association of American Colleges, 1985; Boyer, 1987; Department of Education, 1984). Asking students to compare one kind of course against another may not help illuminate problems of academic quality that are campus wide (e.g., overspecialization, student passivity, the status of teaching relative to research, etc., Association of American Colleges, 1985).

Second, David Clark and Gerald Marker (1975) have argued that institutional variation is a major source that differentiates teacher education programs from one another despite similarities in credit distributions and course titles:

> Given the range of institutional settings it is simply not reasonable to argue that one finds a common teacher education program wherever one looks. Institutional climates vary markedly and these

> variances affect the nature of the student population, the expectations held for student productivity, the background and activities of the faculty and the availability of physical and cultural resources. Such variances are not to be dismissed lightly. They affect all aspects of the relationship between the institution and its students, including the professional preparation of students in teacher training. Thus the critical variance in teacher education programs among institutions is perhaps more a function of overall variance by institutional types than by a systematic variance attributable to professional training itself. . . . Similarity in course structure does not mean identical content of instruction within courses. (pp. 58-59)

If Clark and Marker are correct, then the lumping together of student responses across institutions, a practice common in many studies, becomes troublesome. Of what meaning is an average rating of an education course or a professional course if the range of quality within each category is very large? We are very rarely given information in these studies about the intellectual climate of particular institutions or about how student opinion varied across different institutions.

Another problem with relying only on these kinds of surveys to help us understand the quality of different kinds of courses in the teacher education curriculum is frequent confusion over the meaning of the criteria that are employed to assess the courses. The National Center for Research on Teacher Education (Kennedy, 1987) has argued that two kinds of "quality" need to be considered in any examination of the courses in a teacher education curriculum: <u>academic quality</u> and <u>professional quality</u>. Because teacher education occurs within the context of higher education, it is often gauged only by its academic quality. Here such issues as the intellectual rigor, degree of challenge, and opportunity for intellectual growth become relevant. Professional quality on the other hand, addresses such issues as how the content of a course is related to teaching, how students feel it has helped them become better teachers, and so forth.

There are two problems in this regard. First, it is sometimes not clear in survey studies of student opinion which kind of quality is being assessed. For example, in the Wisconsin study cited earlier (Stiles, 1959), it is not clear when education courses and other courses are compared, whether it was done on the grounds of academic or professional quality. Second, it is sometimes the case that only measures of academic quality are employed.[7] An understanding of the "quality" of different kinds of courses in a teacher education curriculum needs to address both dimensions of quality if it is good teaching (and not merely good scholarship) that we desire.

Finally, the most serious problem with relying solely on student surveys as the source of information about issues of quality is that one misses the potential inherent in making comparisons of various kinds of courses based on more direct knowledge of what actually goes on in the courses. The final section of this paper will discuss ways in which the task can be broadened from that of assessing the quality of courses secondhand, to that of understanding the character and quality of courses through firsthand experience with those courses.

Understanding More About the Character and Quality of Courses in a Teacher Education Curriculum

Rather than relying solely on student opinion surveys to inform us secondhand about the courses in teacher education programs,[8] we need to begin supplementing these polls with more direct and systematic investigations of what various courses are like. We know very little about what actually goes on inside these courses beyond what students or faculty tell us (e.g., Katz and Raths, 1982) or what foundation-sponsored "national studies" have described for us, often based on infrequent and unsystematic "conversations" and observations (e.g., Koerner, 1963). Even the widely acclaimed Conant report

(Conant, 1963) focused more on the number of credits in various areas and on who required them than on the substance of courses. There is no tradition in our field of studying the inner workings of teacher education courses comparable to the enormous amount of work that has been devoted to studying classrooms in the lower schools. Yet major changes in the landscape of teacher education are being planned now, with little knowledge of what teacher education courses are currently like.

One of the first issues to be settled if we decide as a field to establish a tradition of studying ourselves in our work as teacher educators, is to identify a set of criteria that can be employed to help us compare different kinds of courses in teacher education programs. There are also a whole host of methodological issues to be sorted out as well but they, for the most part, will not be discussed here.[9] What will be discussed here are some of the ideas related to dimensions of quality in teacher education that staff of the National Center for Research on Teacher Education have incorporated into their major study, Teacher Education and Learning to Teach.[10] We are a long way from understanding all of the relevant criteria that would need to enter into direct assessments of the relative quality of academic and education courses. What is presented here is offered to encourage researchers to begin to work out the complex conceptual and methodological problems that remain to be tackled. We can begin now on this task with a few comparison criteria and with efforts to find patterns of similarity or difference in education and academic courses using these few criteria as gauges of the character and quality of courses.

As was mentioned earlier, the staff of the NCRTE has drawn a distinction between two different forms of quality in teacher education: academic quality and professional quality. The Center has identified three broad dimensions of

academic quality that can be used to compare and contrast education and academic courses. The first dimension arose in an internal center memo written by David Cohen in 1986. Cohen (1986) proposed level of academic discourse as an important dimension along which courses could be compared. This dimension refers to the extent to which a course fosters the capacity of independent thought. According to Cohen the extent to which teacher education courses foster this capacity depends upon three factors: (a) whether knowledge is portrayed as fixed, codified, and transmittable or as evolving and tentative; (b) whether students are treated as empty vessels into which knowledge is poured or as individuals who can and must construct knowledge themselves; and (c) whether instruction occurs through the transmission of knowledge or through discourse on the subject.

A second dimension of academic quality suggested by the ongoing work of the NCRTE is that of standards. These standards are implicit in such things as the level and difficulty of the readings for a course and in what counts as a good answer in class discussions. They are also explicit in such things as the extent to which class projects and assignments demand time and ingenuity from students. Here the focus would be on both the content and rigor of readings, assignments, projects, exams, and grading criteria, and on the consequences of good and poor performance in a class.

The third dimension of academic quality suggested by the NCRTE studies is the academic tasks that are presented to learners in a course. By tasks, the Center refers to not only the assignments that may accompany courses, but also the activities that go on during class sessions (Kennedy, 1987). Here the focus is on what teacher education students do as learners in particular courses--do they sit and mostly listen to lectures? Are they required merely to regurgitate information back to professors on examinations or are they

required to synthesize and apply information to problematic situations? What are the academic demands associated with the tasks for learners in a course? Are these academic demands in education courses weaker, stronger, or roughly the same as those academic courses at roughly the same level in the curriculum?

Finally, with regard to the professional quality of courses, the attention of researchers would be focused on the ways in which teacher educators portray the relationship between their content and teaching practice and on the messages they communicate about teaching, learners and learning, and subject matter (NCRTE, 1988). Kennedy (1987) suggests that this would include investigations of the ways in which course content is assumed to dictate, to guide, or to exemplify practice. She provides several specific examples of possible relationships within a course between content and practice: (a) students are informed about the role of the content in teaching practice; (b) the relationship of the content to teaching practice is demonstrated; (c) students are given guided opportunities to define the relationship in sheltered or focused practice; (d) students are given unsupervised or unguided opportunities to define the relationships in practice.

There are various ways in which the NCRTE staff are gathering information about these four indicators of quality as they conduct their investigations of the relationships between teacher education and teacher learning. Included in their data-gathering strategies are observations of class sessions, interviews with students and faculty, and analyses of course syllabi, examinations, and assignments (see Kennedy, 1987 for an explanation of the specific data gathering strategies being used for each indicator). Some comparisons between sets of academic courses and education courses using these criteria will be reported in their study.

These criteria now being employed in NCRTE studies of the purposes, character, and quality of teacher education are of course not the only ones that could be employed in attempts to gather information on the conduct of different courses. One could just as easily design studies of courses based on such things as Chickering and Gamson's (1987) "seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education" which provide a slightly different set of lenses with which to view academic quality. The important thing at this point in time is to begin efforts to build a base of more valid information about courses and programs that will be able to inform those who make teacher education policy as well as those who teach and work in the courses and programs.[11] The student opinion surveys should be allowed to continue to play a role in providing us with one source of information about our courses. These polls need to be combined with the kinds of direct comparisons of courses that have been suggested here, though, if we want to establish a more adequate evidential base that will enable us to evaluate the consequences of the various "reforms" now being enacted.

Efforts to prescribe, limit, or increase the numbers of credits in this or that within a teacher education program do not address the issues of academic and professional quality in teacher education. What happens <u>inside</u> these courses defines teacher education's contribution to teacher learning. Right now we know very little as a field about what goes on inside either the professional or academic components of programs. Further, many states are restricting the flexibility of teacher education institutions to experiment with new forms of teacher education, either by mandating new requirements or by placing severe limits on the numbers of courses that can be taken in various areas. Policies formulated without knowledge of the quality of teacher education programs may not only fail to solve the problems they were

intended to address but may in fact lead to the creation of new problems that undermine the academic and professional quality of teacher education programs (Cronin, 1983).

Footnotes

[1]For the sake of simplicity, courses taught within schools, colleges, and departments of education will be referred to as "education courses" and courses taught outside of these units will be referred to as "academic courses." This does not imply the acceptance of a commonly held view that education courses are merely technical or that academic courses are exclusively liberalizing in their function. See Borrowman (1956) for elaboration of this issue. Also, as Lanier and Little (1986) point out, the quarrels and tensions are not just between those inside and those outside education units. Similar frictions often exist between faculty within schools of education who are involved with teacher education and those who are not.

[2]Periodically throughout this debate arguments have been presented for an even more extreme position, the complete elimination of campus-based education courses. For example, Committee Q of the American Association of University Professors (1933) concluded after its analysis of required courses in education across the country that "on the whole, training in subject matter is distinctly superior to professional training. . . . Many students can pass through those departments which are well organized and well conducted and become successful high school teachers, without having had any professional training" (p. 198).

[3]Clearly there are many reasons that have been set forth for limiting education courses and increasing academic courses in a teacher's education other than those that rest on the alleged inferior intellectual quality of education courses. For example, it is argued that reductions in or the elimination of education requirements will attract increasing numbers of bright and well educated people into the occupation. While eliminating the alleged lack of intellectual substance in education courses from a teacher's education is not the only goal of alternative certification programs and policies such as the one in Texas, it is an important assumption in the minds of those who devise such policies.

[4]Ashton and Crocker (1987) reviewed studies that examined the question of how the amount of coursework in professional education and the amount of coursework in academic subjects are related to teacher effectiveness. They describe many methodological problems involved in the studies in this area that make it hard to draw any clear conclusions from the research reviewed. They do conclude, however, that these studies "do not provide an empirical justification for increasing requirements in academic subject areas at the expense of reducing coursework in how to teach" (p. 6).

[5]The mean ratings of specialized area, general education, and professional education courses by both elementary and secondary teacher education students fell mostly near the midpoint of the 11-point scale.

[6]The assistance of Dean Sam Yarger and Jeff Holter of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in providing the data from the Research about Teacher Education Project of AACTE is gratefully acknowledged.

[7]In both the AACTE and NCRTE studies information was collected about both the academic quality and professional quality of courses that were not discussed in this paper.

[8]The AACTE Research about Teacher Education Project also included surveys of faculty perceptions of various kinds of courses.

[9]See NCRTE (in press) for a description of how the Center has decided to grapple with some of these issues in its Teacher Education and Learning to Teach Study.

[10]The NCRTE study examines issues related to the purpose, character and quality of teacher education at three levels: the program, the course, and learning opportunities within courses.

[11]This does not imply a belief that policymakers will act in a rational way on the basis of information gathered on the relative academic and professional quality of different courses.

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